DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 256 545 RC 015 256

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TITLE The Past and Performance of Six Small Rural High School Districts in Iowa.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Rural and Small Schools Conference (6th, Manhattan, KS, October 30, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Comparative Analysis; *Consolidated Schools; Courses; *Educational History; Elementary Secondary Education; Enrollment Trends; Expenditure per Student; High School Students; National Surveys; *Rural Schools; School District Reorganization; *School District Size; *School Effectiveness; *Small Schools
IDENTIFIERS Impact Studies; *Iowa

ABSTRACT

Questions about effects of consolidation on Iowa's small schools can be answered through historical review and current assessment of nine small districts. By 1966, Iowa's 1912 School Consolidation Law and subsequent legislation had reduced 4,500 taxing units to 455, with each district offering K-12 programs to a total enrollment of at least 300 students. In the 9 small districts, average enrollment rose from 204 to 259 during 1945-55. Six of these schools joined with neighboring high schools, two added one-teacher elementary districts, and one did nothing. For the 6 schools which consolidated with high schools, enrollment rose above 300. By 1982-83, however, K-12 enrollment dropped for five of these six schools. In 1982, these schools spent an average of 80% more on each student than surrounding districts. Compared nationally with other rural schools, these six districts were more likely to offer Spanish, French, calculus, physics, computer science, electronics, and a wider variety of sports. In a 1983 administration of the Iowa Tests of Educational Development to grades 9-12 in these 6 districts, 62% of the class units scored better than 50. Half of the scores were higher than Iowa's norm mid-score of 70. Iowa's smallest school districts are caring responsibly for their students. (PM)

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THE PAST AND PERFORMANCE OF SIX SMALL RURAL HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN IOWA

By

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Paper presented at the Sixth Annual Rural and Small Schools Conference, (Manhattan, Kansas, October 30, 1984.)

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The Past and Performance of
Six Small Rural High School Districts in Iowa

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The least of these - the districts - have we (as the people, the public, the state) cared for them? How are they caring for the children?

Public concern for their education dates back in our Western culture at least to the Golden Age of Greece, in the 4th and 5th century B.C.

Plato in The Republic, Book III quotes his teacher, Socrates, in dialogue with a student:[1]

> Socrates: "And surely you would not have the children of your ideal State, whom you are nurturing and education, if the ideal even became a reality--you would not allow the future rulers to be like posts, having no reason in them and yet to be set in authority over the highest matters?"
>
> Student: "Certainly not."
>
> Socrates: "Then you will make a law that they shall have such an education as will enable them to attain the greatest skill in asking and answering questions?"
>
> Student: "Yes, you and I together will make it."

The ideal did become a reality. Years later it came to America when in 1633 the Dutch established a school in New Amsterdam and in 1635 when a grammar school was started in Boston.

You and me, more specifically our forefathers and their forefathers have been making laws for the education of children in each state even before it became a territory.

In 1785 the Continental Congress created the Township system of land measurement and set aside section 16 of each township for the funding of the

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* Presented at the Sixth Annual Rural and Small Schools Conference, Manhattan, Kansas 66506, October 30, 1984.

Common Schools in the township.

In 1838 the township was authorized to be the school district for the support of the common schoolby the General Assembly of the Territory of Iowa.[2]

In 1846 when Iowa became a state, the town was allowed to oe an independent school district, apart from the township, to provide a common school education.

In 1874 the Supreme Court of Michigan allowed the town of Kalamazoo to extend the common school concept through the 12th grade. The public supported high school became a reality.

In 1912 Iowa passed a School Consolidation Law allowing school districts to come together. By 1922 over 400 consolidated districts had been formed. About one fourth of the area of the state was in a high school district and three fourths remained in elementary districts.

In 1954 the General Assembly of Iowa created a law requiring all elementary districts to join with a public high school district by 1962. This year was later extended to 1966. The law established the Community School districts. It requireo a total elementary and secondary enrollment of at least 300 students or 25 per grade. By 1966 Iowa's over 4,500 separate taxing units for common schools had been reduced to 455. Each of the districts offered one year of preschool (kindergarten), eight years of elementary and four years of secondary education.

One of my students gave me a paper just recently with this paragraph:

> "The public school system of Iowa is justly regarded as one of the most complete in the United States. It did not spring at once and full-grown into being, like Minerva form the brain of Jupiter, but is the result of a gradual growth and development through a series of years."

This quote from an Illustrated Atlas of Iowa puolished in 1875[3] was prophetic.

Caring for the least of these, the education of our children and youth--has created many school laws. Schooling has been done with small numbers in many places. For most of this century the common schools were located in the open country. By 1940 when Iowa's population was 60 percent rural very nearly every incorporated town, over 900 of them, had a high school and there were over 3,600 elementary schools in the open country.

That was years ago, 1940 is in the past. What has happened to the least of these, the one-room schools and the small town schools,caring for the education of children? Nine small places, scattered about the state, were selected for this study. Where are they? What has happened to them and the schools? (Figure 1)

Calamus, located on Highway 30 in Clinton County, was in 1940 a town of 374 people. Years before the area around the village had formed a Consolidated school. In 1940 it enrolled 176 students in the 12 grades.[4]

In northeast Iowa, the town of Fayette had also reached out to the farm land in its township to become a Consolidated School. In 1940 the town's population was 1,200 and the 12 grade school enrolled 368 students.

In southern mid-central Iowa, within the Missouri border counties, are the towns of Kellerton in Ringgold County, and 11 miles north and east, Grand River in Decatur County. Kellerton had a population of 600 and Grand River 395 in 1940. Both places had town independent school districts. In 1940 their 12 grade schools enrolled 172 and 137 students. One room school districts in the county paid the high school tuition for their grads to attend the high school, as desired in the town independent and consolidated school districts.

In more central Iowa is Marshall County and is the hamlet of Green Mountain which has never been incorporated. It is six miles north of Marshalltown. Sometime in the early decades of this century the hamlet became an independent district serving its township. By 1940 its 12 grade system had 186 students.

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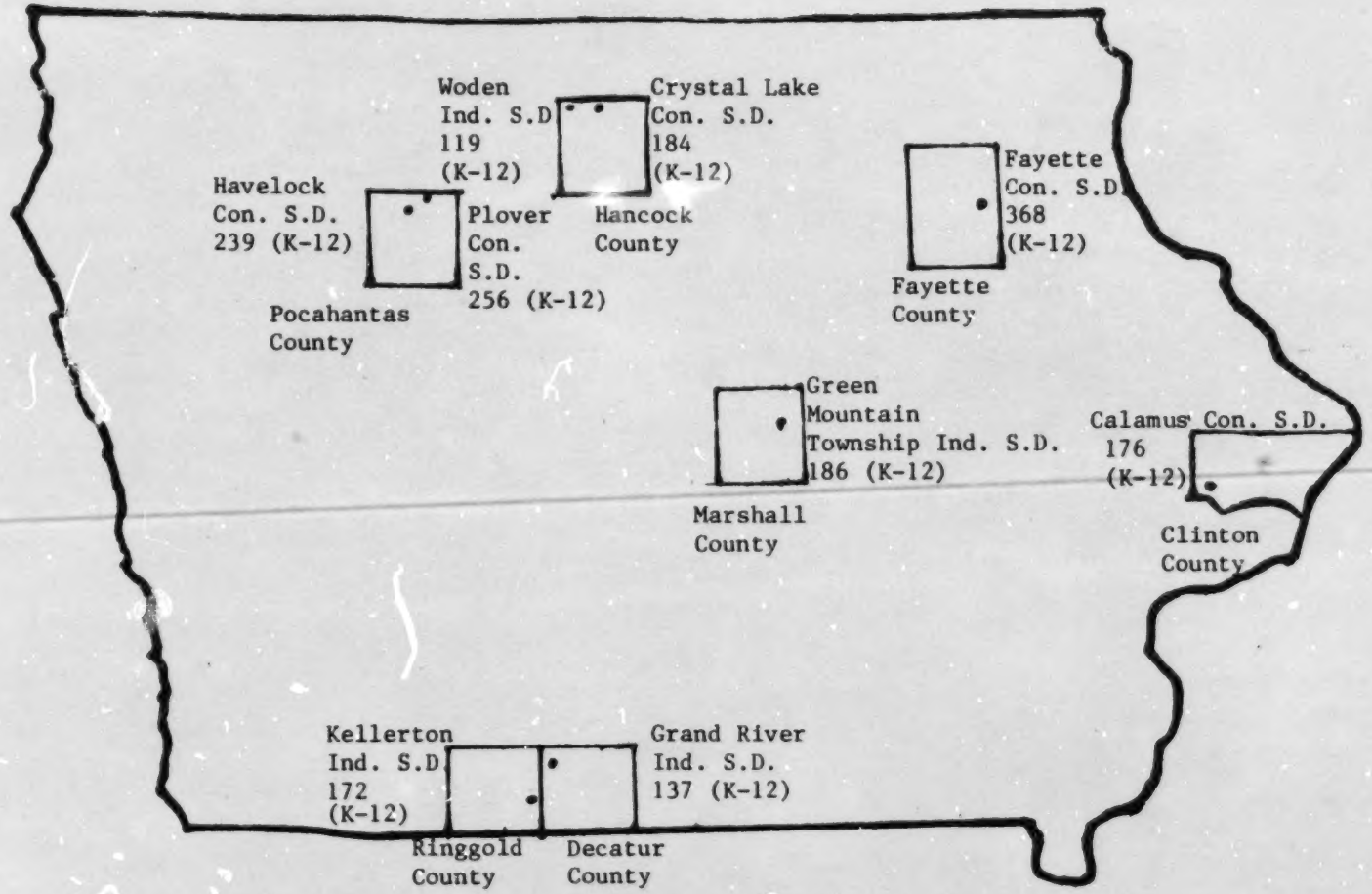
Figure I



Place and County with 1940-41
Type of School District and K-12
Enrollment

In Pocahontas County, northeast Iowa, the towns of Havelock and Clover, just seven miles apart, had each consolidated with their own farm area, probably before World War I. By 1940 the town populations were 350 and 265 people. Their 12 grade school enrollments were 239 and 256 students.

The last selected towns are in north central Iowa in Hancock County. Woden had remained a town independent district over the years and its 1940 population of 303 no doubt included most of its school enrollment of 119. Seven miles straight east, a township away, is Crystal Lake. This town of 301 in 1940 was in the middle of a consolidated school district which had been formed several decades before. In 1940 the 12 grades of Crystal Lake enrolled 184 students.

Fifteen years later, in 1955,[5] the average total enrollment of these 9 districts had changed from 204 to 239, a 17 percent increase. (Table I) With the passing of the Community School Law about that time, seven of these high school districts had to make some changes since their enrollments and all the one-teacher schools included fewer than 300 students.

Six of the districts voted to join with their neighboring high school, one did not change, and two others added only adjacent one-teacher elementary school districts. By 1969 when enrollments were at or near their peak, the six new Community School districts had enrollments ranging from 283 to 497. This was an average K-12 enrollment of 342, a 43 percent increase over their 1955 average.[6]

Green Mountain did not have the minimum 300 enrollment in either 1955 or 1969. However it was very close with 287 and 283 students. No doubt at some time the school enrolled 300. They remained a town independent school district after 1966 with its own high school and elementary grades.

By 1982-83 the K-12 enrollment had decreased for five of the districts.[7] Only Calamus increased from 253 to 288. Woden-Crystal Lake decreased the most

TABLE 1

Enrollment and Professional Staff
of Nine Selected Small Rural High School Districts, in Iowa,
in 1940, 1955, 1969, and 1982

Name & Type of District	1940 Enrollment			1955 Enrollment			1969 Enrollment			1982 Total
	H.S.	K-12 Total	Prof Staff	H.S.	K-12 Total	Prof Staff	H.S.	K-12 Total	Prof Staff	K-12 Enrollment
Calamus	68	176	10	97	347	18	103	253	27	288
Consolidated							Community			
Fayette	130	368	17	133	309	21	153	497	38	247
Consolidated							Community			
Grand River	64	137	8	55	179	10	(Part of Grand Valley with Kellerton)			
Town Independent										
Kellerton	60	172	10	61	222	11	113	339	27	214
Town Independent							Community			
Green Mountain	81	186	9	81	287	15	75	283		229
Town Independent										
Havelock	83	239	12	60	224	15	(Part of Havelock-Plover)			
Consolidated										
Plover	63	256	10	54	167	13	100	290	17	197
Consolidated							Community			
Woden	65	119	6	75	224	12	(Part of Woden-Crystal Lake)			
Town Independent										
Crystal Lake	65	184	8	58	192	11	109	393	27	197
Consolidated							Community			

from 393 in 1969 to 197 in 1982. The 1983 enrollment was still a 12 percent increase over the 1940 base.

Before attempting to determine something about how well these districts are presently caring for their students, the future leaders of our state, a few other comparisons will be made.

The Des Moines Sunday Register listed 70 high school districts in Iowa whose 1983 enrollment was less than 300 students. All six of our selected districts are on this list. The average enrollment of the 70 districts was 228. The same as our sample of six. (Table 2) Dr. Wayne Truesdale in his 1978 study of enrollment trends predicted this sample of six districts would have an average enrollment of 258.7 for 1982, and drop to 253.5 in 1987.[8] The districts presently average 30 fewer than predicted. It seems their 1983 enrollment may be maintained, or slightly decrease in the next five years.

The physical size in land area of the six districts range from 36 square miles, (just a township) to 144 square miles. (Figure II) The average size of the property tax base is 72 square miles. This is slightly less than the mean size of the 70 smallest districts, which is 83 square miles. Public school districts in all of Iowa range in size from 3.0 square miles to 550 square miles. One fourth of all the districts have 83 square miles, or less, in their property tax base.

What is the general investment per student made by these six districts? One measure of per pupil cost (or investment) is the maximum tuition rate which any district may charge nonresident students. These tuition rates are determined by the Department of Public Instruction based on certain specific expenditures. (Table 3)

The six districts in 1982 had annual tuition rates ranging from $1,955 to $2,098. When compared with their neighboring districts, in six nearby counties, the six tuition rates exceeded from 59 to 99 percent of the districts

TABLE 2

Actual K-12 Enrollment
of Six Selected Iowa Districts with Projected Enrollments
from Truesdale's Study, 1969-1987

Selected	Actual Enrollment *			Truesdale's Projected **	
LEA	1969	1977	1982	1982	1987
Calamus	332	354	288	326	339
Fayette	513	374	247	298	267
Grand Valley (Kellerton Grand River)	331	297	214	273	283
Green Mountain	282	253	229	235	246
Havelock - Plover	271	239	197	203	193
Woden - Crystal Lake	360	276	197	217	193
Mean	348	297	229	258.7	253.5

* Des Moines Sunday Register, December 4, 1983, p. 7A

** A Study of Iowa's Public Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Trends by Wayne P. Truesdale, The University of Northern Iowa College of Education, Iowa City, 1978.

TABLE 3

Area in Square Miles and Tuition Rate
for Specially Selected Small Rural School Districts

LEA	AEA Number	County	Sq. Mi. in District	Tuition Rate and Rank of Amount Within Own AEA and its Percentile for 1981-82 Year		
				Amount	Rank	Percentile
Calamus	9	Clinton	63.9	$1,955	8th of 24	67
Fayette	1	Fayette	36.4	$2,010	1st of 27	99
Grand Valley	14	Ringgold	144.0	$2,010	9th of 21	59
Green Mountain	6	Marshall	39.0	$2,053	1st of 21	99
Havelock-Plover	5	Pocahontas	66.1	$2,054	15th of 45	67
Woden-Crystal Lake	2	Hancock	81.3	$2,098	3rd of 28	89

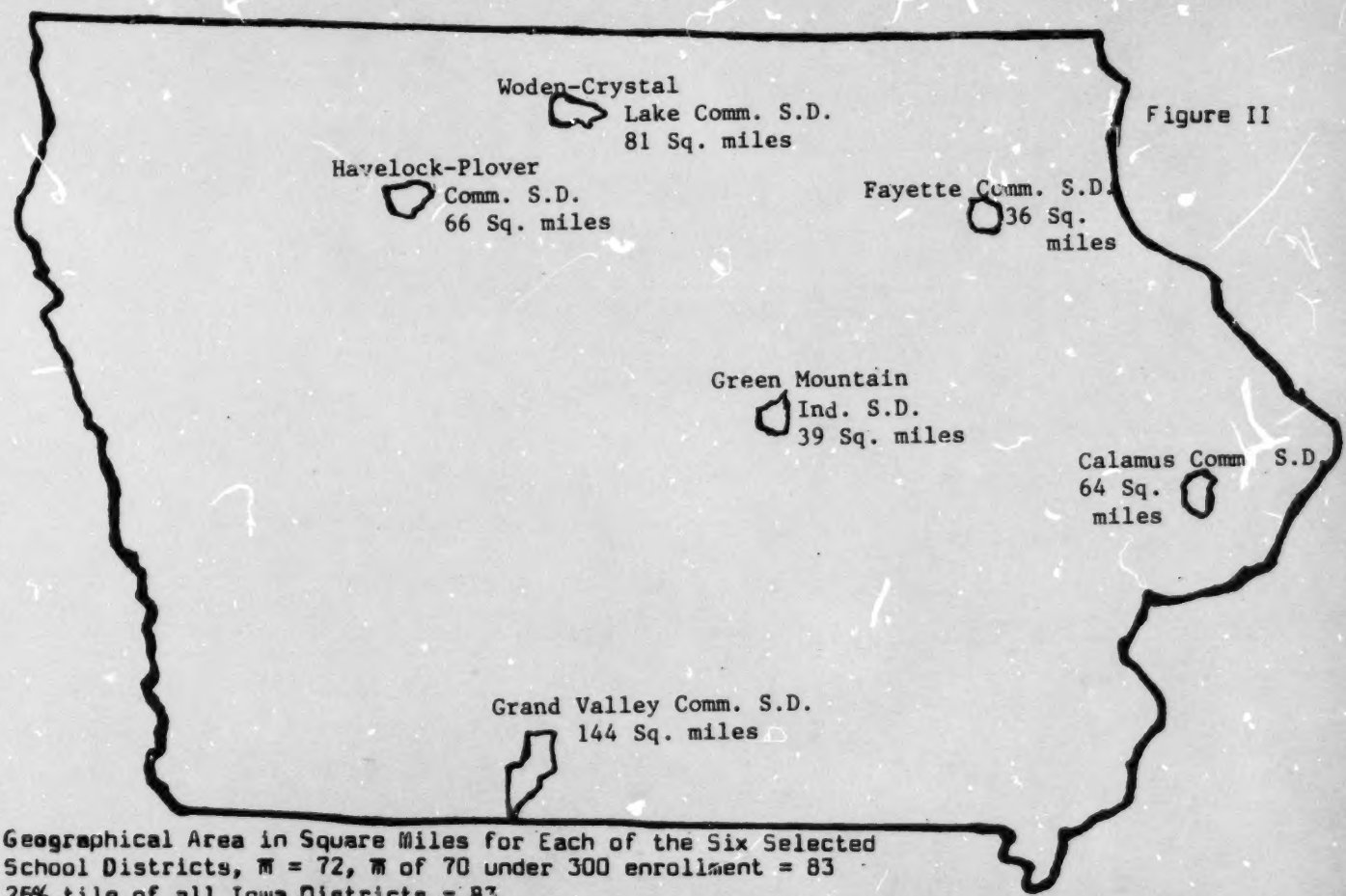


Figure II

Geographical Area in Square Miles for Each of the Six Selected School Districts, M = 72, M of 70 under 300 enrollment = 83
25% tile of all Iowa Districts = 83

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in their own area.

In summary the six districts had a mean enrollment of 228, K-12, equal to the average of the 70 districts in Iowa enrolling less than 300 students. The six districts average 72 aquare miles in size, smaller than one fourth of all Iowa districts. There tuition rates exceed, on the average 80 percent their neighboring districts.

How well are these districts caring for the students enrolled in their high schools? First a rather general comparison of school programs will be presented. Finally, a table will show the achievements of these students, based on the scores made by each high school grade based on the Iowa Tests of Educational Development percentile.

Barker and Muse (1984)[9] reported a study of small/rural districts and compared the Iowa districts with the national sample. Their sample were districts which enrolled 900 or fewer students. Their evidence presents some interesting comparisons of Iowa with a nation-wide sample of similar size districts.

Using a rule of thumb that a difference of ten percent is worth noting, Iowa districts were more likely to offer six of the nine courses named in the study. (Table 4) These were: Spanish, French, Calculus, Physics, Computer Science, and Electronics.

The Barker study also compared the offering of 10 sports. Iowa students were also more likely to have available nine of the ten sports, than were small/rural districts of 900 and fewer students nation-wide. Every district in both samples enjoyed basketball. But in addition, Barker and Muse reported every Iowa district sampled also offered: baseball, softball, track and field, and soccer. Iowa schools more often had football, volleyball, golf, wrestling, and cross-country track.

TABLE 4

School Programs of National Sample
of Small/Rural Districts with K-12 Enrollment of 900 Students or Less*
Comparing Iowa with National Sample
Showing Percent Districts Offering Program

	Percent of Sample			Percent of Sample	
Courses Offered	Iowa	Nation	Sports	Iowa	Nation
Spanish	58.5	41.8	Basketball	100	100
German	9.7	9.7	Baseball	100	55.4
French	29.3	18.9	Softball	100	37.1
Calculus	51.2	35.9	Soccer	100	7.0
Chemistry	87.2	79.4	Track & Field	100	78.7
Physics	85.3	67.7	Football	85.4	69.2
Computer Science	75.6	60.3	Volleyball	70.7	65.7
Electronics	31.7	13.0	Golf	56.1	22.4
Vocational Aq.	58.5	63.1	Wrestling	51.2	25.2
			Cross Country Track	36.6	23.3
The Rural Districts in Study					
$\bar{m}$ Enrollment	434	436			
$\bar{m}$ Square Miles	180	245			
$\bar{m}$ furthest one-way bussed in miles	16.1	19.0			

* Barker, Bruce O., and Muse, Ivan D., "A Profile of Small/Rural School Districts in Iowa Compared to School Districts of Similar Size Nationwide." Paper presented at "People United for Rural Education" Conference, Des Moines, Iowa, 1984. pp. 4, 5.

Finally, is there some evidence that these rural districts, the very least of the 439 in Iowa, are adequately preparing and caring for the youth attending the smallest public high schools of the state? Can it be shown that Iowa, in the words of Socrates, does not "allow the future rulers to be like posts, having no reason in them?"

In 1983 each of the six selected districts gave all four of their high school classes the Iowa Tests of Educational Development. The Des Moines Sunday Register on December 4, 1983, reported the average scores per class in percentile rank, based on both the Iowa and National norms.

The results are shown in Table 5. Based on Iowa norms we would expect 12 of the scores to be over 50. Instead in these districts 15 grades or 62% have an average score over 50. Among these four grades the mid score on Iowa norms is 70, with 12 of the 24 being higher. On the national norm all scores are above the 50th and 22 of the 24 are acores above the 70th percentile, that's 92 percent of the comparisons.

Caring for the least, providing them with an education is a responsibility shared by the persons in the family, the people of the neighborhood, the public of community and the citizens of the state. The public school systems of Iowa demand continual study, evaluation, and adjustments. The concerns of the smallest communities and schools should be known and accented by the people of the state. The evidence from this study indicates the least of these, the smallest school districts are caring for their students as well as the larger or average size Iowa K-12 School Unit.

TABLE 5

Iowa Tests of Educational Development
Mean Percentile Rank for High School Classes
of Six Specially Selected Small/Rural Districts

Mean Scores in Iowa and U.S. Percentile

	Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
District	Iowa	US	Iowa	US	Iowa	Us	Iowa	US
Calamus	12	68	68	87	48	80	74	86
Fayette	99	99	89	97	80	93	99	99
Grand Valley	74	94	90	92	80	95	60	82
Green Mountain	97	98	80	90	95	97	32	68
Havelock-Plover	6	56	32	74	61	86	36	76
Woden-Crystal Lake	40	83	25	71	86	96	39	77

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